

SIDNEY AND BEATRICE WEBB

CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND FOR A DOUBLE STAR

ALMOST impossible, nowadays, to think of Sidney and Beatrice Webb except as a couple. It is not only that they have written, together, books in which no one can detach what belongs to one from what belongs to the other. They talk, if you meet them, in the dual, almost always "We think," one will say "Our idea is the other will go on. Sometimes, one of them gives a lecture, the other answers questions on it, on the next occasion, the parts will be reversed, but the substance of the lecture, and of the answers, will be just the same. When they say "we," the listener knows, no matter who uses it, that the number is right, the thinking is, somehow,—he does not know quite how—a joint process. Who can bring to mind any issue, large or small, on which they disagree? They do not look alike, yet one has heard that they can interchange shoes, hats and gloves, even that, at the period, now remote, when bicycling was the rage, Mrs Webb had a complete outfit available for shocking the shockable in her husband's wardrobe.

Everyone talks, invariably, of "the Webbs", and finds it hard to believe that this entity ever existed in separate parts. They are in fact, and have been, for forty years, the brightest example of what she has called a "double-star personality, the light of one being

indistinguishable
from that of the other " The effective fusion of
two shining